



Jones, E. T. (2011, Jan 11). Licence for vessels to lade and unlade goods at Bristol between 4am and 8pm, 12 April 1563. Unpublished. <http://hdl.handle.net/1983/1698>

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Evan T. Jones (ed.), ‘Licence for vessels to lade and unlade goods at Bristol between 4am and 8pm, 12 April 1563’, The National Archives: Public Record Office, C66/987 m.35 (University of Bristol, ROSE, 2011)¹

*Pro maiore, Burgensibus
& Comunitate civitatis
Bristoll de Speciale ~
licencia² ~*

Elizabeth by the grace of god &c. Whereas in oure Parliament holden at Westminster the xxiiijth daye of January in the firste yere of oure Reigne³ yt was enacted⁴ that it shold not bee lawfull to or for any person or persons from and after the first daye of Septembre nexte ensuinge thesaid Parliament to lade or putt or cause to be laden or putt of or from any wharfe keye or other place on the land into any Shippe, Vessell, Crayer, ~ lighter or bottome any goodes wares or merchaundises whatsoever (fyshe and salte onelie excepted) to be ~ transported unto any place beyond the Seas or in or to the Realme of Scotland or to take uppe dischardge or laye on land or cause or procure to be taken uppe or dischardged out of any lighter, Shippe, Crayar, ~ vessell, or bottome (beinge not in leake or wrakke⁵) and layed on land any goodes wares or merchaundises whatsoever (fyshe and Salte onelie excepted) to be broughte frome any the parties beyonde the Seas or the Realme of Scotland by waye of merchaundise but onelie in the day tyme/ that is to saye frome ~ the firste daye of Marche untill the laste daye of Septembre betwene the sonne rysinge and the ~ sonne settinge/ And frome the last of Septembre untill the firste of Marche betwene the howers ~ of seaven in the morninge and foure in the after none uppon payne of forfaiture of all suche goodes wares or merchaundizes soe laden or unladen or dischardged contrarie to the tenure and true meaninge of thesaid ~ Acte or the value thereof as in thesaid statute more at large it maye appeare/ And for that the haven of oure Cittie and porte of Bristowe is soe daungerous and lowe of water, (excepte it be in the Springe tides⁶) that noe greate shippe or greate vessell beinge laden with wares and merchaundizes canne or maye comme nere thesaid Cittie by distaunce of foure myles⁷ by reason the water there dothe ebbe & flowe sodenlie not above five ~ or sixe howers at a tide nor above sixe dayes in a Springe tyme to serve for ladinge and unladinge of ~

¹ The following conventions were employed when transcribing this document: the line spacing, spelling, capitalization and punctuation follow the manuscript; reconstructions of suspensions are in italics. My thanks to Margaret Condon (University of Bristol) for proof reading the text and for her advice on the Latin.

² This can be translated as: ‘Respecting a special licence for the Mayor, Burgesses and Commons of the city of Bristol’.

³ 23 January 1559.

⁴ ‘An Acte limiting the tymes for laying on Lande Marchandise from beyonde the Seas, and touching Customes for Sweete Wynes,’ *Statutes of the Realm*, IV, pp. 372-4.

⁵ ‘wrakke’: wreck.

⁶ ‘Spring tides’ are the high tides that occur twice-monthly around the time of the new and full moon.

⁷ The implication is that, at other times, fully-laden great ships could not get further than the Hungroad, near Shirehampton, four miles downriver from Bristol.

Shippes Crayers & other Vesselles⁸ Whereby suche Vessells that before the makinge of the saide Acte myght have bene dischargd there within foure dayes canne not nowe be dischargd within fyftene daies to the daunger⁹ and greate charges of suche as repayre thither with the Shippes & merchaundizes¹⁰ ~ ye shall knowe that we of oure especiall grace mere mocion¹¹ zeale and favoure that we beare to oure said Cittie of Bristowe and to the Inhabitantes there for the causes & consideracions aforesaid and for other causes and consideracions us speciallie movinge haue ~ geven and graunted and by thies *presentes* for us oure heires & Successours doe geve and graunte and licence ~ unto our trustie & Welbeloved the Mayor Burgisses & *Comminaltie* of oure Cittie of Bristowe and to the Inhabitantes and resiauntes¹² in thesame, that they and all other repayinge to thesaid Cittie Towne and porte of Bristowe with shippes Crayars bottes lighters and other Vesselles laden or unladen shall and maye lawfullie without incurringe the penaltie of thesaid estatute frome hensforthe lade & unlade charge & discharge theire said Shippes Crayers boates ~ ~ lighters and other Vesselles of their goodes Wares and merchaundizes and to putt and laye thesame on land And frome land to putt their goodes Wares or merchaundises into any Shippe, Crayer, lighter, or other Vessel or bottome to be ~ ~ transported into any partes beyond the Seas or to the Realme of Scotland at any tyme betwene the howers of foure in the morninge and eighte of the Clocke in the after none¹³ (the Custome & Subsidie of Tonnage and pondage to us and oure heires and Successours therof due all wayes saved)¹⁴ thesaid estatute made in thesaid Parliament in the firste ~ yere of our Raigne or any thinge therein conteyned to the contrarie in any wiese notwithstandinge ~ ffor that expresse ~ mencion &c. In witnes whereof &c. witnes ouer selfe at Westminster the xijth daye of Aprill in the fifte¹⁵ yere of oure Raigne¹⁶ ~ *per breve de priuatto Sigillo* &c.¹⁷

⁸ In other words, vessels could only be laden or unladen for five or six hours each tide, over a six-day period around the spring-tides. This implies that for about sixteen days each month the lading or unlading of vessels was impossible and that, even during the spring-tides, it was only possible to do so for about ten to twelve hours of each day. At other times, ships were presumably left stranded on the mud and difficult to reach.

⁹ 'daies to the daunger' is an inserted interlineation.

¹⁰ The suggestion is that the prohibition on night-time lading was cutting down on the number of tides when lading or unlading could take place. This meant that ships that might have been fully unladen in eight shifts over the course of a single Spring tide, now had to wait till the next spring tide to complete the task. Unlading would thus take place over four days in one spring tide, followed by a gap of seven days when unlading would be impossible, followed by another four days of unlading – making fifteen days in total.

¹¹ 'mere mocion': mere motion – i.e. performed without the assistance or involvement of other parties.

¹² 'resiauntes': residents.

¹³ Vessels could thus now be laden or unladen between 4 a.m. and 8 p.m., any time of the year. This would have increased the permissible lading period between October and February from nine hours per day to sixteen hours per day. This is likely to have been particularly useful to those engaged in the wine trade, since most wine arrived during the winter: E. T. Jones, 'The Bristol Shipping Industry in the Sixteenth Century' (PhD, Edinburgh 1998), pp. 62-64. By contrast, the dispensation would have made little difference during the summer, since from c.24 May - 20 July, the sun rises before 4 a.m. and sets after 8 p.m. During the period around the summer solstice, the terms of the 1559 Act presumably applied – allowing lading to commence as early as 3.40 a.m. and to cease as late as 9.20 p.m.

¹⁴ 'Custome' refers primarily to the duties on exported English broadcloth and tanned hides. The principal parliamentary subsidies were 'tonnage' (a duty payable on wine imports) and 'poundage', a five percent *ad valorem* duty levied on the nominal value of all other goods.

¹⁵ 'fifte': fifth.

¹⁶ 12 April 1563.

¹⁷ 'By writ of privy seal'. This indicates that the authorising warrant, sent to the Lord Chancellor for the letters patent to be drawn up and sealed, ran under the privy seal.